AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

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Visa changes need to go further – Catholic Church

The federal government's decision to allow some refugees on Temporary Protection Visas to apply for permanent residency was a welcome move but needed to go further, a Catholic Bishop said today.

Bishop Joseph Grech, the chairman of the Bishops' Committee for Migrants and Refugees said the decision to allow TPV holders living and working in regional areas to apply for permanent residency would be welcomed by the refugees and the communities of which they are a part.

However for TPV holders living in cities, the government's announcement did not go far enough, he said.

"This announcement, while welcome for those people who benefit from it, does nothing to address the central unfairness of the TPV system," Bishop Grech said.

"All people who are granted a TPV have been found to be genuine refugees, but they are denied permanent protection because of the method of their arrival in Australia.

"The Catholic Church has argued consistently that all genuine refugees are deserving of Australia's complete and ongoing protection.

"This further distinction between refugees who live and work in the country and those who reside in cities creates yet another class of refugee in Australia."

Bishop Grech said that while many regional and rural communities had opened their arms to TPV holders and provided jobs and assistance, so too had communities within Australia's cities, often providing to these people the support which is denied them by the government.

The fact that the changes announced by the government applied only to current TPV holders and not to future arrivals was also a concern, he said.

"We will always welcome any changes to government policy which allow genuine refugees to apply for permanent protection, but will continue to press for ongoing protection for all refugees, no matter how they arrive."

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